

The

# THOREAU SOCIETY

## BULLETIN

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SUMMER, 1983

### THE ANNUAL MEETING: MERGER WINS!!!

The annual meeting of the Thoreau Society was held at the First Parish Church in Concord on Saturday, July 9, 1983. Coffee and doughnuts were served at nine by a committee chaired by Lucile Needham. The business meeting, chaired by the president, Ann Zwinger, began at ten. The minutes of the 1982 meeting were accepted as printed in the Summer 1982 bulletin. The treasurer's report was read and accepted.

The Rev. Dana McLean Greeley, chairman of the Merger Committee gave the following report:

Mr. President, Friends of the Thoreau Society, this report need not be too thorough, but it can be comprehensive. It was three years ago this morning when it was announced that in the following year a resolution would be presented to the annual meeting calling for a study of a possible merger between the Thoreau Society and the Thoreau Foundation (i.e., the Thoreau Lyceum). At the annual meeting in 1981 that resolution was offered and passed almost unanimously. The then president, John McAleer, subsequently appointed a Merger Committee. That committee went to work in the middle of that year. It reported a year ago, in 1982, at the annual meeting and was encouraged by an unanimous vote from the society to further pursue the goal of merger. Here we are in 1983 ready to act upon a proposal. The committee has met consistently and persistently through eighteen months. I should name the members of the committee: Albert Bussewitz, John Clymer, Malcolm Ferguson, Dana McLean Greeley (chairman), John McAleer, Mary McClintock, Lucile Needham, plus Ann Zwinger, ex officio. Ann Zwinger has attended all our meetings and has contributed most wisely with very pertinent suggestions and questions, and restraint at times equal to her enthusiasm at other times. Walter Harding and Anne McGrath have been consultants and have met with the committee many times. Marcia Moss and Eugene Walker, as members of the nominating committee, have attended several of our meetings and have made their contributions to many of the discussions. We decided at a very early date that as far as we could tell there were no obstacles that would stand seriously in the way of merger. We also concluded that there were many positive reasons why we should merge the two organizations. The committee has worked very harmoniously. There have been no serious disagreements and no tensions or controversies during our de-

The Thoreau Society, Inc., is an informal gathering of students and followers of Henry David Thoreau and now includes the Thoreau Lyceum. Ann Zwinger, Colorado Springs, Co., is president; Marian Wheeler, Concord, vice-president; Mary Anderson, Concord, treasurer; and Walter Harding, SUNY, Geneseo N.Y., 14454, secretary. Address communications to the secretary. Dues (\$5.00 a year until Oct. 1, 1983; \$10.00, thereafter; life membership, \$100.00) should be sent to the Thoreau Society, P.O.Box 165, Concord, Mass. 01742.

liberations. Jack Clymer worked very hard for us on our set of new by-laws. We examined and re-examined what he put before us, and many changes were made. He was most patient with us, and certainly was qualified to work with us in this as in many other connections. Our excellent secretary, Lucile Needham, says that we reviewed the by-laws four times and that he rewrote them four times. She knows, because she had to rewrite them in the minutes four times. We do not believe that you will wish to debate the by-laws in detail. There is flexibility in them and in our minds, and we suggest that if you desire certain changes, you present your thoughts to the officers in the coming year, and amendments can be placed before us twelve months from now, or five years from now, at your pleasure.

We have considered the criticisms of a number of friends who have been apprehensive about the merger, although we early judged that a very large preponderance of our two memberships would favor a merger. A few people have feared any change at all. Some have wisely recalled that change is not always improvement. We hope and believe that in this case it will represent improvement. Some people were worried about a greater local domination of the society in the event of merger. There have been criticisms even in the past that ad hoc Concord groups have exercised excessive influence. Other people have wondered if "outlanders" would not try in the future to run the Lyceum. We want the new Thoreau Society to be both local and universal. The president, Ann Zwinger and Jack Clymer and I believe that a Concord base and the widest possible participation can go hand in hand.

It was suggested promptly in our deliberations, suggested, I believe, by the present president of the Lyceum, that the name of the new merged organization would be The Thoreau Society. The Lyceum would of course become the Lyceum of the Society, or the Thoreau Lyceum, under the aegis of the Thoreau Society. We would of course maintain the Lyceum as it is, but improve it if indeed at any time it seems subject to improvement, and we would maintain the curator and staff as they now exist. We reviewed the finances very carefully, and discussed the fears of some people that deficits on the part of one organization might jeopardize the integrity or health of the other. We

believe that both are in healthy condition, in spite of some past deficits on both sides. We made out a budget for a merged organization and we are confident that there is not danger that will be involved in a merger that cannot be resolved, or that does not exist already as a threat to one of the bodies. We are solvent currently, and the new organization can be solvent. The Lyceum budget is many times larger than the Thoreau Society's budget. They will supplement one another and reinforce one another. The memberships will of course be put together and become a common membership. Nobody will be disenfranchised. Life members of the Thoreau Society will be life members of the new merged organizations.

We are utterly delighted that Walter Harding, who for several years, has been telling the Society, or its executive committee, that he ought to cut down on his work, and that he has retired from his professorial post--we are utterly delighted that Walter Harding will continue to serve as secretary and as editor. The Thoreau Society 42 years ago was his idea in the first place; he gathered a small group around himself initially for the organization of the society; and he has been the society's personification and our wise counsellor and servant throughout these decades.

We are recommending putting the two boards (i.e., the executive committee of the Thoreau Society and the board of trustees of the Thoreau Foundation--the Lyceum) together, creating a new board of all of the members of the two boards; and we acknowledge that this will create a large board, but we suggest that as terms run out in the future, the size of the board should be reduced. We have not wished to decide any of the present leadership. We shall speak later under nominations of the fact that we feel privileged to have Ann Zwingler continue one more year as president. This gives some extra continuity through the merger, and symbolically adds some strength to our life. Frederick Wagner, who has served already a year as our president-elect, will serve another year in that office, and then favor us by succeeding to the presidency, for we hope more than a year, hopefully two or three years.

The bulletin with all this information and the by-laws and with mail ballots has been in the hands of our members for some weeks. We are greatly encouraged by the mail ballots that have been returned to us. We need a 2/3 vote, the approval of 2/3 of our voting members to make merger legal. The Thoreau Lyceum (technically the Thoreau Foundation) has already voted through its board of trustees in favor of the merger.

It was then moved and seconded: Resolved: to approve the Agreement of Merger presented to the meeting by and between the Trustees of the Thoreau Foundation, Inc. (the Thoreau Lyceum) and the Executive Committee of the Thoreau Society Inc. in the form presented to the meeting, with the Thoreau Society being the surviving corporation on the terms and conditions set forth in the Agreement of Merger and in accordance with the General Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts; and to authorize the President and the Treasurer of the

Thoreau Society to execute such agreement. A vote of those present who had not already filed proxies was taken and it was announced that the total was 501 votes for and 11 against, only 14 votes short of the necessary 515. The remaining 14 votes were rounded up shortly and it was officially announced that merger had won. (The merger committee will meet once more on July 28th to work out a few necessary details and then will be discharged. The merger itself will become legal reality as soon thereafter as the necessary papers can be filed with the Secretary of the Commonwealth.)

A motion was then made and seconded and approved unanimously to raise the dues of the society to ten dollars a year, beginning October 1, 1983. Members who wish to may renew at the old rate of five dollars for as many years as they want before that date.

Roland Robbins announced that he was donating to the society pieces of brick and plaster found when he excavated the site of Thoreau's cabin at Walden in 1945, and that these would be mounted on appropriately lettered plaques and presented to any who became new life members of the society so long as the supply lasted. The plaques, although designed, have not yet been manufactured, and will be sent out when they are ready to anyone who becomes a new life member on or after July 9, 1983.

After Roland Robbins read a short tribute to the late Robert Wilde, Marian Wheeler announced that there was now a total of \$2125 in the Robert Wilde memorial fund and that the president would appoint an ad hoc committee to decide upon appropriate use of those funds.

Rev. Dana McLean Greeley, as chairman of the nominating committee, presented the following slate of officers for the newly merged society (and to serve as interim officers until the newly merged society attains legal existence with the filing of appropriate papers with the Secretary of the Commonwealth): for terms of one year: Ann Zwingler, president; Frederick Wagner, president-elect; Marian Wheeler, vice-president; Walter Harding, secretary; Mary Anderson, treasurer; and John Clymer, chairman of the executive committee; as members of the board of directors for the remainder of their presently elected terms as members of either the executive committee of the Thoreau Society or of the board of directors of the Thoreau Foundation, or for three years, whichever is lesser: Malcolm Ferguson, Linda Henning, Jane Langton, Michael Meyer, Fritz Oehlschlaeger, Edmund Schofield Jr., Esther Almgren, Suzanne Altshuler, William Bailey, Thomas Blanding, Sharon Crawford, Persis Green, Sylvia Klinck, Jason Korell, Mary McClintock, Eleanor Moore, and Milton Paige, Jr. Past presidents of the Thoreau Society--Raymond Adams, J. Lyndon Shanley, Paul Oehser, Carl Bode, Lewis Leary, Roland Robbins, G. Russell Ready, R.L.Cook, Henry Beattle Hough, Frederick T. McGill Jr., Albert Bussewitz, Leonard Kleinfeld, William Howarth, Eugene Walker, Wendell Glick, H.H.Uhlig, W. Stephen Thomas, Paul Williams, Dana McLean

Greeley, Anne McGrath, Walter Harding, and John McAleer--and past vice presidents of the society--Robert Needham, Patience Hosmer MacPherson--will be ex officio members of the board when they are present.

Kevin VanAnglen announced for the Princeton University Press Thoreau Edition that their new editions of Volume Two of the Journal will appear in September, Translations in December, and a new illustrated edition of A Week this August.

Thomas Blanding announced the gift to the society and the lyceum by Theodore, Quincy and Alice Abbot of Pennsylvania, direct descendants of Ellen Sewall, of approximately 150 Sewall and Ward family letters, including letters written by Edmund Sewall when a pupil in the Thoreau school, letters by Prudence Ward when she was a boarder in the Thoreau household, and diaries (originals and transcripts) of Edmund Sewall, plus other family memorabilia. These supplement more than 300 Ward family letters and the only authorized microfilm of the Sewall-Ward-Osgood-Davenport papers. These were all acquired through the efforts of Mr. Blanding who is now editing them. A fuller report will be given when the papers are all catalogued.

Roderick Nash spoke on "Keeping the Wild in Wilderness: Preservation Frontiers Thoreau Never Knew." Ann Zwinger delivered the presidential address on Thoreau and women. After the luncheon, Albert Bussewitz conducted the annual Thoreau quiz, which was followed by the usual walks and visits to Thoreau sites. The Dinsmores once more hosted a tour of the Thoreau-Alcott House. The Lyceum hosted the annual sherry party and box supper. In the evening, J. Parker Huber showed slides of his tours of Thoreau's Maine Woods. On Sunday morning, Rev. Dana McLean Greeley preached on "Thoreau and Institutionalism" at the First Parish Church.

Aug. 9, 1860

NOTES AND QUERIES . . .

We are indebted to the following for information used in this bulletin: J. Aton, T. Balaam, W. Bly, W. Bottorff, A. Bula, C. Burley, A. Claveaux, D. Colona, J. Dawson, M. Detterline, R. DeMiller, D. Frank, R. Fleck, R. Galvin, G. Hannon, R. Haebner, P. Hauser, R. Haynes, M. Hughes, D. Kamen-Kaye, A. Kamp, K. Kasegawa, A. Kovar, P. Laver, G. Lowden, A. McGrath, W. McInnes, M. Moss, G. Ryan, E. Schofield, R. Thompson, and S. Wellman. Please keep the secretary informed of new items as they appear and old ones he has missed.

We grieve to announce the death of Arthur Volkman, 85, a long-time active member of the society, on June 13, 1983 in Wilmington, Del.

Thoreauvians in the Boston area are invited to join bi-monthly informal luncheon discussions to be held at the College Club, 44 Commonwealth Ave., Boston, beginning Sept. 16 and then on Nov. 4th. Reservations must be made by Sept. 7 and Oct. 26. For details send stamped addressed envelope to Ed Schofield, 99 Main St., Concord 01742 or call 617-247-4100 weekdays or 617-369-4797 evenings or week-ends.

THOPEAU AND WOMEN by Ann Zwinger. (the 1983 presidential address)

On January 31, 1852 Thoreau entered in his journal:

"In the East, women religiously conceal that they have faces; in the West, that they have legs. In both cases they make it evident that they have but little brains."

Even when he admired a woman, as he certainly did Miss Mary Emerson, he admired her for her "masculine appreciation of poetry and philosophy" (Nov. 13, 1851) rather than for her feminine insights and intelligence, and opined that she was "not prevented by any intellectuality as women commonly are."

Some five years later (April 23, 1857) he described 20 year-old Kate Brady with high regard for her love of nature, whose "cheerful and original" plan to live alone in her homestead stemmed from her love of countryside and home there. But after this praise, he admits that being a female may be a greater obstacle to overcome than wanting to live alone for "Her own sex, so tamely bred, only jeer at her for entertaining such an idea..."

Both as a woman and as a writer I'd like to take strong exception to Mr. Thoreau. His statements about the intelligence of women come close to slander. I should like to prove him wrong on his own ground--as an observer of the natural world about him. Surely some of the most appealing writing about the natural world has been done by my predecessors and contemporaries who are women. Some of them were not "writers" in the professional sense, but simply women who, at one time or another, recorded for their own or another's pleasure the tilt of the earth and the slant of the sky.

Since Mr. Thoreau is not here to defend himself, I bring my case before the Thoreau Society, a gathering of erudite and impassioned admirers of Mr. Thoreau who know him far better than I. I plead my case through the eloquence of my feminine companions. To do so, here are passages from the defendant (Mr. Thoreau) of his recurring themes; the seasons and their passage, the weather, acute observations of the world about him. I follow them with similar passages from Journals, letters, essays and published works by the plaintiffs--the women writers.

1

One of the writers whom Thoreau admired was Wordsworth, and it is a pity he could not have known the journals of Dorothy Wordsworth, William's devoted sister. In May of 1852, Thoreau wrote in his journal about the residual coldness from a storm the previous day, and the trees so familiar to a New England spring: "All these expanding leaves and flower-buds are much more beautiful in the rain,--covered with clear drops. They have lost some of their beauty when I have shaken the drops off. They who do not walk in the woods in the rain never behold them in their freshest, most radiant and blooming beauty. The white birch is a very handsome object, with its golden tassels three inches long, hanging directly down, amid the just expanding yellowish-green leaves, their

perpendicularity contrasting with the direction of the branches, geometry mixed with nature."

To read Dorothy Wordsworth's journal is to see that the springs of New England and England cannot have been so different. Dorothy Wordsworth must have been an exceptional woman, praised by Coleridge and commemorated in poetry by her brother. Like Thoreau, she kept a journal, and like his, many of her entries begin with "Walked" and "Went to." On Friday, May 14th, 1798, she and William went walking in the cold:

"The oak trees are just putting forth yellow knots of leaves. The ashes with their flowers passing away, and leaves are coming out. The blue hyacinth is not quite full blown; gowans are coming out, marsh marigolds in full glory; the little star plant, a star without a flower. We took home a great load of gowans, and planted them in the cold about the orchard." ("Gowan," an archaic word for yellow and gold flowers, was often applied to daisies.) It hailed and snowed that same day, and when Dorothy Wordsworth went to bed that night the juxtaposition of spring and winter landscape struck her:

"It was a strange night. The hills were covered over with a slight covering of hail or snow, just so as to give them a hoary winter look with the black rocks. The woods looked miserable, the coppices green as grass, which looked quite unnatural, and they seemed half shrivelled up, as if they shrank from the air. O, thought I! what a beautiful thing God has made winter to be, by stripping the trees, and letting us see their shapes and forms. What a freedom does it seem to give to the storms!"

## 2

The lovely song of the hermit thrush haunts the rivers and woods of Concord. Thoreau wrote about one on April 27, 1854 (even though he mistakenly called it a wood thrush): "The wood thrush afar,--so superior a strain to that of other birds. I was doubting if it would affect me as of yore, but it did measurably. I did not believe there could be such differences. This is the gospel according to the wood thrush. He makes a sabbath out of a week-day. I could go to hear him, could buy a pew in his church. Did he ever practice pulpit eloquence?"

Having heard my first hermit thrush only a few years ago while canoeing on the Concord River, I found myself delighted by Mabel Osgood Wright's description. She was an amateur ornithologist who subtitled her best-known book, *Birdcraft*, as "A Field Book of Two Hundred Song, Game, and Water Birds," scarcely an unambitious undertaking. She was the founder and first president of the Connecticut Audubon Society and fostered interest in the first bird sanctuaries. Her clear observation of bird behaviour and habitat was mixed with more personal passages, such as this immediate and lovely one about the hermit thrush:

"This spring, the first week in May, when standing at the window about six o'clock in the morning, I heard an unusual note, and listened, thinking it at first a Wood Thrush

and then a Thrasher, but soon finding that it was neither of these I opened the window softly and looked among the nearby shrubs, with my glass. The wonderful melody ascended gradually in the scale as it progressed, now trilling, now legato, the most perfect, exalted, unrestrained, yet withal, finished bird song that I ever heard. At the final note I caught sight of the singer perched among the lower sprays of a dogwood tree. I could see him perfectly: it was the Hermit Thrush! . . . the Hermit tunes his lute sometimes in inaccessible solitudes, and there is something immaterial and immortal about the song. Presently you cease altogether to associate it was a bird, and it inspires a kindred feeling in every one who hears it."

## 3

Anyone who walks the wild paths a great deal comes to develop other senses than sight. Thoreau certainly did. On May 16, 1852, he wrote:

"Here on this causeway is the sweetest fragrance I have perceived this season, blown from the newly flooded meadows. I cannot imagine what there is to produce it. No nosegay can equal it. It is ambrosially, nectareally, fine and subtle, for you can see naught but the water, with green spires of meadow grass rising above it. Yet no flower from the Islands of the Blessed could smell sweeter. Yet I shall never know whence it comes. . . ."

And again in July of 1852:

No one has ever put into words what the odor of water-lilies expresses. A sweet and innocent purity. The perfect purity of the flower is not to be surpassed."

The same appreciation of fragrance was expressed by Mary Webb, a young English woman, in *The Spring of Joy*, written in the early decades of this century. She was the daughter of a schoolmaster, largely educated at home, but a journalist and writer from her teens. With her evocative words we can close our eyes and recall the scents of our own walks in early summer, as well as ponder deeper botanical mysteries:

"The origin of flower scents is full of mystery. Sometimes they seem to run through the minute veins like an ichor, as in wall-flowers, with their scented petals; sometimes they are locked in the pollen casket, or brim the nectar-cup; sometimes from the roots in addition, as in primroses and lilies. . . . Flowers like the oxlip, with transparently thin petals, only faintly washed with color, yet have a distinct and pervasive scent. Daisies are redolent of babyhood and whiteness. Wood anemones, lady's smock, bird's-foot trefoil and other frail flowers will permeate a room with their fresh breath. In some deep lane one is suddenly pierced to the heart by the sweetness of woodruff, inhabitant of hidden places, shining like a little lamp on a table of green leaves. . . ."

## 4

Storms are always noted by people who spend a great deal of time outdoors for their occasional severity is cause for con-

cern. If Mark Twain was right and everyone talks about the weather, surely the most discussed department is storms. Of dozens of descriptions, here's one from Walden:

"Some of my pleasantest hours were during the long rain storms in the spring or fall, which confined me to the house for the afternoon as well as the forenoon, soothed by their ceaseless roar and pelting; when an early twilight ushered in a long evening in which many thoughts had time to take root and unfold themselves. In those driving north-east rains . . . I sat behind my door in my little house, which was all entry, and thoroughly enjoyed its protection."

As a westerner, I must admit to finding myself closer in spirit to Mary Austin as she writes about storms in the mountains than the New Englander safe and dry beneath his own roof. Mary Austin declared at age 7 that she was going to be a writer, and so she became. She grew up on a farm in Illinois, but departed the familiar rolling fields and green vistas for the stark desert areas of California--the Owens Valley at the eastern edge of the Sierra Nevada. Her best known book, The Land of Little Rain, was written first as a series of essays in 1903. In it she wrote about the storms in her mountain country, interweaving her comment with some casual but acute botanical observation:

"One who goes often into a hill country learns not to say: What if it should rain? It always does rain somewhere among the peaks: the unusual thing is that one should escape it. You might suppose that if you took any account of plant contrivances to save their pollen powder against showers. Note how many there are deep-throated and bell-flowered like the penstemons, how many have nodding pedicels as the columbine, how many grow in copse shelters and grow there only. There is keen delight in the quick showers of summer canons, with the added comfort, born of experience, of knowing that no harm comes of a wetting at high altitudes. The day is warm; a white cloud spies over the canon wall, slips up behind the ridge to cross it by some windy pass, obscures your sun. Next you hear the rain drum on the broad-leaved hellebore, and beat down the mimulus beside the brook. You shelter on the lee of some strong pine with shut-winged butterflies and merry, fiddling creatures of the wood. Runnels of rain water from the glacier-slips swirl through the pine needles into rivulets; the streams froth and rise in the banks. The sky is white with cloud; the sky is gray with rain; the sky is clear. The summer shower leaves no wake."

5

Thoreau was often enchanted by the fullness of a summer's day and the picturesqueness of the pastoral scene; in July of 1852 he entered his pleasure at traveling down the Sudbury River:

"After passing Hubbard's Bridge, lookin up the smooth river between the rows of button-bushes, willows, and pads, we see the sun shining on Fair Haven Hill behind a sun-born cloud, while we are in shadow--a misty gold-

en light, yellow, fern-like, with shadows of clouds flitting across its slope,--and horses in their pasture standing with outstretched necks to watch us; and now they dash up the steep in single files, as if to exhibit their limbs and mettle. . . To one rowing past in the middle of a warm summer day, a well at a distance from the house in the shadow of an oak, as here, is a charming sight. The house, too, with no yard but an open lawn sloping to the river."

I refer you to Elinore Pruitt Stuart, a doughty young woman who, when widowed, supported herself and her young daughter by working as a "washlady" in Denver. She applied for the job of housekeeper for a Wyoming rancher, a Scotsman named Clyde Stewart, a dour sort who retired to his room to play his bagpipes every night after dinner. Nevertheless, he soon perceived the worth of this resourceful and cheerful woman, and after six weeks proposed to make the arrangement permanent. Her life was not an easy one, but her letters back to her former employer in Denver, published as Letters of a Woman Homesteader, are as upbeat as a summer's day. Witness her description of the Henry's Fork valley, a tributary to the Green River in Wyoming:

"For a distance our way lay up Henry's Fork valley; prosperous little ranches dotted the view, ripening grain rustled pleasantly in the warm morning sunshine, and closely cut alfalfa fields made bright spots of emerald against the dun landscape. The quaking aspens were just beginning to turn yellow; everywhere purple asters were a blaze of glory except where the rabbitbush grew in clumps, waving its feathery plumes of gold. Over it all the sky was so deeply blue, with little, airy, white clouds drifting lazily along. Every breeze brought scents of cedar, pine, and sage. At this point the road wound along the base of cedar hills; some magpies were holding a noisy caucus among the trees, a pair of bluebirds twittered excitedly upon a fence, and high overhead a great black eagle soared."

6

Thoreau's travels were mainly in New England, which is not lacking in evergreen forests. On July 19, 1858, walking on Mt. Washington, he wrote about the krummholtz at the limit of trees with his typical accuracy and insight:

"As I remember, those dwarf firs on the mountains grew up straight three or four feet without diminishing much if any, and then sent forth every way very stout branches, like bulls' horns or shorter, horizontally four or five feet each way. They were stout because they grew so slowly. Apparently they were kept flat-topped by the snow and wind. But when the surrounding trees rose above them, they, being sheltered a little, apparently sent up shoots from the horizontal limbs, which were also more or less bent, and this added to the horn-like appearance."

Another chronicler of timberline was Isabella Bird. The intrepid Ms. Bird made a trip from San Francisco to Estes Park in

1873. She did the trip alone with guides over mountains that often lacked trails, at a time when "nice girls didn't." She wrote letters to her sister which were collected and published as A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains. She recorded her reactions to an ascent so steep that everyone but she had to dismount and walk, and the branches lacerated equipment and horse alike:

"The gloom of the dense, ancient, silent forest is to me awe inspiring. On such an evening it is soundless, except for the branches creaking in the soft wind, the frequent snap of decayed timber, and a murmur in the pine tops as of a not distant waterfall, all tending to produce eeriness and a sadness "hardly akin to pain." There no lumberer's axe has ever rung. The trees die when they have attained their prime, and stand there, dead and bare, till the fierce mountain winds lay them prostrate. The pines grew smaller and more sparse as we ascended, and the last stragglers wore a tortured, warring look. The timber line was passed, but yet a little higher a slope of mountain meadow dipped to the south-west towards a bright stream trickling under ice and icicles, and there a grove of the beautiful silver spruce marked our camping ground."

7

Thoreau usually made note of the first snowfall, for it was a matter of note even as it is today for anyone living close to the country. Summer, the time of green and growing, seems suddenly replaced by white and falling silence, the swift silent slice of winter. Thoreau wrote on November 14, 1858: "After expecting snow all day,--though we did not know but it would prove rain,--we looked out the window at 9 P.M. and saw the ground for the most part white with the first sugaring, which at first we could hardly tell from a mild moonlight,--only there was no moon. Thus it comes stealthily in the night and changes the whole aspect of the earth. . . It is wonderful what gradation and harmony there is in nature. The light reflected from bare twigs at this season--i.e., since they began to be bare, in the latter part of October--is not only like that from gossamer, but like that which will ere long be reflected from the ice that will incrust them. So the bleached herbage of the fields is like frost, and frost like snow, and one prepares for the other."

Florence Page Jaques was familiar, from summer, with the canoe country, the border-land between Canada and Minnesota, that she was to write about in her second book, Snowshoe Country. In the early 1940's she and her husband, wildlife artist Francis Lee Jaques, spent the winter here. She describes awakening to her first snowfall of the year on October 12th:

"All the forest was white with dim green undertones; the horizontal branches of our great pines held ledges of snow precariously against the misted sky. In the marsh the tamaracks had not yet lost their needles and their lemon yellow--a strange, clear color--was only faintly veiled, so that

they looked as if moonlight were entangled in their branches."

8

Thoreau was as decisive a describer of animals as plants and the weather. In October, 1852, he found a loon at Walden Pond:

"As I was paddling along the north shore, after having looked in vain over the pond for a loon, suddenly a loon, sailing toward the middle, a few rods in front, set up his wild laugh and betrayed himself. I pursued with a paddle and he dived. . . He managed very cunningly, and I could not get within half a dozen rods of him. Sometimes he would come up unexpectedly on the opposite side of me, as if he had passed directly under the boat. So long-winded was he, so unwearable, that he would immediately plunge again, and then no wit could divine where in the deep pond, beneath the smooth surface, he might be speeding his way like a fish, perchance passing under the boat. . . When I was straining my eyes over the surface, I would suddenly be startled by his unearthly laugh behind me. But why, after displaying so much cunning, did he betray himself the moment he came to the surface with that loud laugh? . . . perhaps the wildest sound I ever heard, making the woods ring. . ."

Sally Carrighar's Icebound Summer is a classic presentation of animal behavior; she scarcely seems a ground-bound spectator as she describes a female loon tilting in for a landing:

"She tilted the rudder formed by the trailing webs of her feet and began to descend. Choosing a straight lead of water ahead, she dropped the clean arc of her body and soon was cleaving the surface, her breast a keel and her wings held aloft like black sails. When she came to a stop, she dived, her slender black bill turning down on her breast with a motion that seemed to draw her below. She darted about in the liquid tunnel between the deep masses of ice, pursuing a tomcod. When she had speared it, she came up and, tossing the fish in the air, caught it head-first in her throat."

9

There were marshes aplenty in Thoreau's world. In this passage from July 16, 1852, he describes Beck Stow's Swamp:

"When life looks sandy and barren, is reduced to its lowest terms, we have no appetite, and it has no flavor, then let me visit such a swamp as this, deep and impenetrable, where the earth quakes for a rod around you at every step, with its open water where the swallows skim and twitter, its meadow and cotton-grass, its dense patches of dwarf andromeda, now brownish-green, with clumps of blueberry bushes, its spruces and its verdurous border of woods imbowering it on every side."

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings is most familiar for The Yearling but her other books are as full of charm and understanding. In Cross Creek she wrote about the swamps of Florida and how it was to be in the midst of one: "I was prepared for marsh. It was startling to discover that there was in sight literally nothing else. Far to the west,

almost out of sight to the east, in a dark line like cloud banks was the distant swamp that edged this fluid prairie. We may have taken the wrong channel for a mile or so, for we never saw the sugar-berry tree; nothing but river grass, brittle and gold, interspersed, where the ground was highest, with butter-yellow flowers like tansy. By standing up in the boat I could see the rest of the universe. And the universe was yellow marsh, with a pitiless blue infinity over it, and we were lost at the bottom."

10

My last exhibit finds Mr. Thoreau on the beaches of Cape Cod. There he continued the same kind of poking and picking and sifting with which he explored his home ground of Walden Pond. The beach must have fascinated him for he took special note of all that he saw:

"The beach was also strewn with beautiful sea-jellies, which the wreckers call sun-squall, one of the lowest forms of animal life, some white, some wine-colored, and a foot in diameter. I at first thought that they were a tender part of some marine monster, which the storm or some other foe had mangled. What right has the sea to bear in its bosom such tender things as sea-jellies and mosses, when it has such a boisterous shore, that the stoutest fabrics are wrecked against it. I did not at first recognize these for the same which I had formerly seen in myriads in Boston Harbor, rising, with a waving motion, to the surface, as if to meet the sun, and discoloring the waters far and wide, so that I seemed to be sailing through a mere sun-fish soup. They say that when you endeavour to take one up, it will spill out the other side of your hand like quicksilver."

An interesting account. But let me read you a beautiful passage, richly written, full of implications and vast awareness of the sea world. It comes from what is to me the perfect book, Rachel Carson's The Edge of the Sea:

"During many days of midsummer, the incoming tides bring the round opalescent forms of the moon jellies. Most of them are in the weakened condition that accompanies the fulfillment of their life cycle; their tissues are easily torn by the slightest turbulence of water, and when the tide carries them in over the rockweeds and then withdraws, leaving them there like crumpled cellophane, they seldom survive the tidal interval.

"Each year they come, sometimes only a few at a time, sometimes in immense numbers. Drifting shoreward, their silent approach is unheralded even by the cries of sea birds, who have no interest in the jellyfish as food, for their tissues are largely water. . By the end of October all of the season's jellyfish have been destroyed by storms, but their offspring survive, attached to the rocks near the low-tide line or on nearby bottoms offshore."

Ladies and gentlemen of the Society, surely the eloquence and charm of these passionate and compassionate observers has not left you unmoved. I deliberately chose not only literary passages, but those more intimate records, written for only one other person's eyes. Everyone of them fulfills Thoreau's tenants

for good writing, and I call him as witness in absentia and quote words of 1852:

"The forcible writer stands bodily behind his words with his experience. He does not make books out of books, but he has been there in person."

On September, 1851: ". . . we cannot write well or truly but what we write with gusto." And from May 4, 1854:

"There is no such thing as pure objective observation. Your observation, to be interesting, i.e., to be significant, must be subjective."

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I think you have had enough voting today to release you from further ballot, but I trust that in your private and personal communications with the Sage of Walden Pond that you will deliver the words of these entralling women. If their only fault is that they are women, I trust that you will find that that is insufficient reason for Henry David Thoreau not to admit them to his company and find in their wit and perception an equal and noble foil to his own.



Sept. 11, 1860

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